Kinship navigator programs: how to find the one in your state

A kinship navigator is a person whose entire job is to help relatives raising children find the benefit, the form, the lawyer, or the support group they need. Most caregivers never learn the role exists. This guide is the shortcut to finding yours and getting something useful out of the first call.

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IMPORTANT NOTE

Programs are funded and named differently in every state, and some are run by nonprofits under state contract. If a phone number is disconnected or a page is out of date, call 211 — they keep local listings current.

WHO THIS GUIDE CAN HELP

- **For professionals**
  Keep the 'what to ask on the first call' list on hand — it converts a vague referral into a documented set of next steps for the family.
- **For supporters**
  Funding a caregiver's first month of gas, school supplies, and clothing is often what keeps a placement stable while benefits are still processing.

WHAT A NAVIGATOR ACTUALLY DOES FOR YOU

- **Tells you what you qualify for**
  Child-only TANF, Medicaid or CHIP for the child, SNAP, childcare subsidies, school meal programs, and one-time emergency funds. Navigators know the local names and current amounts.
- **Helps with the paperwork**
  Many navigators will sit with you through applications, caregiver affidavits, and school enrollment, and will call the agency with you when an application stalls.

- **Connects you to legal help**
  Guardianship, custody, visitation, and school-authority questions get routed to legal aid, a self-help court center, or a law school clinic — usually free.
- **Puts you with other caregivers**
  Support groups, respite programs, and caregiver training. This is the piece caregivers say mattered most a year later.

FOUR WAYS TO FIND YOURS

- **1. Search your state plus the phrase**
  Try "[your state] kinship navigator program," then "[your state] kinship care program," then "[your state] relative caregiver program." Look for a .gov page or a named nonprofit — skip directory sites stuffed with ads.
- **2. Call 211**
  Free, confidential, available nationwide by phone or at 211.org. Say: 'I am a relative raising a child and I am looking for the kinship navigator program and any caregiver support in my county.'
- **3. Ask your state's Area Agency on Aging**
  Grandparents raising grandchildren are frequently served through aging services rather than child welfare, including through the National Family Caregiver Support Program. If child welfare says no, aging services may say yes.
- **4. Ask the school**
  District foster care and homeless liaisons know which local organizations actually answer the phone, and they can enroll the child while everything else is pending.

WHAT TO ASK ON THE FIRST CALL

Write these down before you dial, and write the answers down during the call along with the person's name and a callback number.

- Am I eligible for a child-only grant, and what is it called in this state?
- What health coverage can the child get, and does my income count?
- What do I need to enroll the child in school this week?
- Is there emergency help for beds, clothing, school supplies, or utilities?
- Is there free legal help for guardianship or custody?
- Is there a kinship caregiver support group nearby or online?
- Is there a waitlist, and what should I do while I wait?
- Who do I call if something goes wrong — and can I use your name?

IF THERE IS NO PROGRAM NEAR YOU

- **Go through 211 and aging services**
  Between them they cover most counties in the country with some version of caregiver support, even where no formal navigator exists.
- **Use legal aid directly**
  Search '[your county] legal aid' for custody, guardianship, and school-authority help. Many offices prioritize relative caregivers.
- **Lean on the school and the clinic**
  School liaisons and pediatric social workers are unofficial navigators — they know local resources and they already know your child.
- **Come to MFGP**
  The #FKLM Family Blueprint covers caregiver wellness, legal literacy, education pathways, and co-parenting, and it is free to use at your own pace.

+ QUESTIONS FAMILIES ASK

- **What is a kinship navigator program?**
  It is a state-funded or state-contracted service that helps relatives raising children find benefits, legal help, and support. Navigators know local rules, can tell you what you qualify for, and often help you complete the applications. Nearly every state has one, run either by the child welfare agency or a nonprofit partner.
- **How do I find the kinship navigator in my state?**
  Search your state's name plus 'kinship navigator program,' and if that returns nothing, try 'kinship care program' or 'relative caregiver program.' Calling 211 works anywhere in the US and gets you a live person with current county-level listings.
- **Do I need legal custody to use a kinship navigator?**
  No. Navigators serve informal kinship caregivers too — in fact that is the majority of who they see. You do not need a court order, an open child welfare case, or any paperwork to make the call.
- **Is a kinship navigator program free?**
  Yes. Navigator services are publicly funded and free to caregivers, and the legal aid, benefit application, and support group referrals they make are typically free as well.

+ KEEP GOING

- **Kinship care navigator**
  https://www.myfairygodparents.org/resources/guides/kinship-care-navigator
- **Caregiver authorization affidavit**
  https://www.myfairygodparents.org/resources/guides/caregiver-authorization-affidavit
- **Caregiver wellness in the Family Blueprint**
  https://www.myfairygodparents.org/resources/family-blueprint/caregiver-wellness

More guides and family resources: myfairygodparents.org/resources

Questions or corrections: donate@MyFairyGodParents.org | +1 (949) 919-0765